

Statement of U.S. Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA)
regarding DR-CAFTA

The goal of the United States, on behalf of its workers, manufacturers and consumers, should continue to be an open and fair trading system. When the North American Free Trade Agreement was approved in order to take down many barriers to trade with Mexico and Canada, President Clinton simultaneously secured, and pledged to implement, side agreements on labor and environmental issues. In recent years, NAFTA's implementation has been badly marred by the unwillingness of the Bush Administration to treat these side agreements on environmental and labor standards as critical components of trade relations with these countries. Instead, they have been treated as an afterthought. For instance, the Bush Administration's early and total abandonment of the Kyoto Accord's environmental initiatives is emblematic of the short shrift the Administration gives to such efforts in international affairs.

For these reasons, I opposed granting President Bush fast-track authority to ram through additional trade agreements without appropriate measures to ensure that sensible labor, currency, food safety, consumer privacy, environmental and other public interest issues are fully aired and addressed simultaneous to the adoption of any new trade pact. At some point, the world trading system is going to have to come to terms with the fact these public interest issues are not afterthoughts, they must be part and parcel of international conversations over trade issues.

The Free Trade agreement with the Dominican Republic and 5 Central American countries (DR-CAFTA) is merely the latest failure on the part of the Bush Administration to effectively negotiate trade agreements which grow markets in ways that also advance labor rights and environmental protection. DR-CAFTA's failure to include enforceable labor and environmental requirements represents a step backwards from the provisions of the U.S.-Jordan Free Trade Agreement. The Jordan agreement enjoyed broad support from environmentalists and labor unions in the U.S. and Jordan, and passed the U.S. Congress unanimously in 2001.

I believe that international trade and investment can and should be supportive of labor rights and environmental protection. Since the Bush Administration has failed utterly to make progress on either front, either within or outside of the actual provisions of the trade pact, DR-CAFTA is unsupportable in my view. I intend to vote against it. When the Administration brings to Congress an agreement for the DR-CAFTA countries similar to the agreement the U.S. struck with Jordan, I will support it.

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